

## **Section D-6 Marketing**

The contents of this Toolkit have been developed to assist you in your efforts to support family readiness. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information provided is current and accurate. However, because statutory and regulatory changes may have occurred since the publication of this Toolkit, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs cannot assume responsibility for its continued accuracy. Before taking any significant action based on the contents of this Toolkit, you should contact a subject matter expert in your chain of command to secure the most current information.

## Marketing

Family readiness programs are two-dimensional. First, they are fundamentally information centric. Effective family readiness programs educate commanders, service members, and family members on the availability of programs and resources. They use information to motivate and guide their audience to take steps to promote family readiness and self-sufficiency. Second, family readiness programs rely on volunteers for a significant portion of their human resources. Ultimately, family readiness programs cannot exist unless they sell themselves as a cause worthy of the investment of personal time and commitment.

Marketing and publicity are two ways for family readiness programs to move information and expand participation. As with any military activity, marketing and publicity require planning, resourcing, and aggressive implementation. All plans start with an objective and supporting goals. Obviously, the objective is to strengthen family readiness and reduce the impact of family separations on morale and retention. To succeed, your marketing efforts must achieve several goals that will contribute to the final attainment of that objective:

- Commanders and unit staff must view family readiness as an integral element of unit mission capabilities. They must allocate sufficient resources (including their own time) and make family readiness a part of their unit plans and training.
- Commanders, leaders, and staff members must know the resources available for family members and ensure that they are capable of competently referring service members and their spouses to the appropriate service provider or resource.
- Service members must understand their responsibility to prepare their family for the challenges of duty related separation and understand how to accomplish that task.
- Family members must be aware of available services and resources and be motivated to use them before, during, and after duty related separations.
- Everyone must be motivated to promote and support family readiness program volunteerism.

If they are to succeed, your marketing efforts must overcome a number of significant barriers. Understanding these barriers will guide your marketing plan and help you to develop coping strategies. Some of the barriers you face are:

- **Command Pressure and Priorities:** Most Guard and Reserve commanders, leaders, and staff members are part-time service members. They are breadwinners, mothers and fathers, who must allocate their limited time among many competing demands. Training and mission related concerns dominate their thoughts. They may not perceive family readiness as contributing to mission readiness and may be unwilling to dedicate limited resources to the family readiness program.

- **Limited Resources:** Any marketing program can thrive with unlimited funding and staffing. Unfortunately, all programs have budgets and commanders have limited resources that can be devoted to family readiness. Limited resources, however, are not an excuse for weak marketing. Instead, resource limitations are merely factors that must be considered when planning a marketing campaign.
- **Apathy and Indifference:** Service members and their families are human beings. Everyone tends to put off tasks that are not related to an immediate requirement. Preparation is, by its very definition, an activity whose payoff is in the future. Service members and their families may not understand or accept the challenges involved and the impact of duty related separations. They may even be prone to denial. Rather than face the possibility of prolonged separation and even the death or injury of the family breadwinner, some families will avoid these responsibilities.
- **Distance:** Most Guard and Reserve units are geographically dispersed. Geographical distance makes effective marketing to commanders, leaders, staff, service members and families more difficult and often more costly. Moreover, family members do not attend drills and often live far from their sponsor's unit. Service members may not always give information and printed materials to their spouses.

Your planning process should begin with an honest assessment of your current marketing efforts. Some considerations when making an assessment of the marketing and public relations for family readiness programs and family readiness groups (FRGs):

- Examining program's printed materials. Are they welcoming?
- Program funding. How is the program funded?
- Mailing. Do mailings (i.e. newsletters) go out all year?
- Two-way street. Is the only time people hear from your organization when you want something?
- Getting the word out. If you sponsor special events, how are they publicized?
- Including volunteers. Are volunteers involved in the planning and implementation of these special events?
- Facilities. How welcoming are the unit and offices?
- Responsiveness. What happens when people call the family readiness program?
- Ease of communication. Do you have a toll-free telephone number?
- Using technology. Do you have a web site or other Internet-based resources dedicated to family readiness?
- Perception. What is your program's general reputation?

- Constant program evaluation. How often does the program change? Are you (the program) perceived as flexible and responsive?

Once you have an honest assessment, your next step should be to identify the key planning factors in any marketing efforts. Those factors are:

- **Target audience:** Who do you need to reach? Commanders, leaders, key staff members, service members, and family members should be included. But don't forget others who can materially assist you in your marketing effort. These other members of the target audience include community leaders, civic organizations, and the local media.
- **Media:** How can you reach the target audience? Certainly, newsletters are high on your list of available media, but don't limit your analysis. Look carefully at the Internet (unit web sites), unit/armory bulletin boards, unit/family activities, pre-deployment briefings, local news organizations, telephone trees, civic organizations, community social agencies, and your network of volunteers. As you examine media, make sure you assess availability, cost, and effectiveness. Effectiveness can be measured in terms of how likely it is to reach the majority of the target audience or audience segment.
- **Message:** What do you want to tell your audience? Your message should be directly linked to your objective and goals. Additionally, it must be tailored to each segment of the audience. For example, one message may be related to the need for service members to complete a family care plan. However, the way you persuade a commander of the importance of family care plans needs to be very much different from the way in which you address this issue with a service member or spouse.
- **Resources:** What resources are available to get the message to deliver to the target audience? Obviously, when we think of resources, we think of money. There are, however, many more resources to consider. For example, this Toolkit and the many Internet resources listed in this toolkit represent a fantastic marketing resource. The posters and brochures that came with this Toolkit and can be downloaded and printed from the Internet at <http://www.defenselink.mil/ra/family/toolkit/>. The Help Guide to Guard & Reserve Family Readiness provides invaluable information regarding best practices and model family readiness initiatives that have been tested and proven effective. Your search for resources should involve direct contacts with your higher headquarters. Finally, your research would be incomplete if it did not capitalize on the almost infinite resources of the Internet. Just entering "family readiness" into an Internet search engine yields more than 190,000 individual web site references.

Using the knowledge gained through your assessment of current marketing activities and the key planning factors discussed in this section of the Toolkit, you should be ready to formalize your plan. A solid marketing plan must be specific as to what is to be done, who will do it, how it will be done, and when it will be done. Your plan should cover an entire year and be integrated into your command's planning cycle. Programmed activities should be coordinated with known command activities such as training cycles and planned unit deployments. Your plan must be

fully coordinated and resourced before it can be implemented. Without command involvement, the plan will not receive the priority and support it requires. Finally, your marketing plan must serve as the foundation for the marketing activities of subordinate units. You should work closely with the units to help them understand their role and begin their own marketing plan.

Marketing is a method for communicating essential information to commanders, leaders, and staff members, as well as service members and their families. Marketing is also the means by which we motivate these key individuals to play an essential role in preparing our Reserve component families for any eventuality. Careful planning is the only means by which an effective marketing campaign can be developed and executed.